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ABSTRACT

A study examined the impact of teaching communication on the marital roles of communication teachers and their spouses. Subjects, two male and two female communication professionals and their spouses, tape recorded their responses to eight discussion questions in a comfortable conversational format. Four themes emerged from the transcripts of the discussion: (1) possession of cognitive knowledge does not guarantee application; (2) the most positive applications seemed to be those in which the communication professional reached integration of the skill; (3) spouses expect effective communication from communication professionals; and (4) communication professionals and their spouses engaged in metacommunication frequently. Findings suggest that the ability to communicate about a couple's communication appears to be an important skill for facilitating constructive conflict in the marital relationship. Appropriate, contextual, and timely metacommunication should be added to the dimensions of marital communication competence. (Nineteen references, the discussion questions, and a form for listing demographic information are attached.) (RS)

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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION TEACHING ON THE ROLE OF THE SPOUSE

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ABSTRACT

In this paper research exploring effects of work roles on family roles is summarized. An argument is made for using a communication competence framework to examine the impact of teaching communication on the spousal role. In an exploratory study conducted with communication teachers and their spouses, four themes emerged:

1. Knowing and saying doesn't mean doing.
2. "Natural"--the key to positive application
3. Higher standards are expected
4. Let's metacommunicate

Spouse of Communication Professional: I think you are listening, but when you don't remember later, I think that you weren't listening. It makes me believe that you didn't hear or think about it.

Communication Professional: I just don't remember. I don't retain. I get into a loop and it goes round and round and I don't see an answer because I am trying to analyze and there's no answer...When I do my analysis, I bounce back and forth between I can't believe she's doing what she's doing and I have a name and can know what's happening, but she doesn't have a name for it and she doesn't and may not have the intent behind it that my analysis is giving it.

Spouse: I think I'm aware when _____ (husband) is caught in his little loop and I find it very frustrating because I figure that he shouldn't be analyzing. He should just be listening. Also, there's a part of me trying to figure what he's doing, and so I'm caught up in that. (Couple 2, Feb., 1993)

The preceding dialogue was recorded by a couple during their participation in the study reported in this paper. The mini-study was designed to explore what impact teaching communication might have on one's role as a spouse. In this paper, we present a brief summary of research investigating effects of work on family, discuss why a communication competence framework provides a useful perspective, describe procedures for the present study, and report our results and analysis.

IMPACT OF WORK ON FAMILY

Research that explores the impact of work on family is a relatively recent development. For many years, work and family were viewed separately, a position described by Kanter (1977) as the "myth of separate worlds" (p.78). In 1955, Talcott Parsons, in Family: Socialization, and Interaction Processes advanced a

view of role division within the family specifying the male as the family's instrumental (task) leader who fulfills the provider role and is concerned with the external affairs of the system. The female was viewed as the socio-emotional or expressive leader, concentrating on internal affairs of the system and on system maintenance. Thus, males' primary roles were in the work place, and females' primary roles were within the family. Connections between work and family were hidden.

Although Parsons' position has been critiqued heavily, it influenced research which does examine interactions between work and family. Researchers have most ofter used male samples to study effects of work, particularly work conflict on the family. Studies which examine effects of family conflict on work have usually used female samples (Hughes et. al, 1992). Work-family conflict, according to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) occurs when role pressures from work and family are "mutually incompatible" (p.77). The effect of work roles on the family has been the most frequently investigated relationship, rather than the effects of family roles on work.

Effects of Work Roles on Family

A research strategy that has often been employed correlates job structure characteristics with measures of marital satisfaction or quality (Bolger et. al, 1989). Important findings include: (1) a positive relationship between shift work, number of hours worked, and work-family conflict (Staines and Pleck, 1983); (2) a positive relationship between rate of

environmental change, ambiguity, low leadership support and interaction facilitation, stressful communication, physical and psychological demands, mental concentration, and work-family conflict; (3) a negative relationship between job challenge, importance, variety, and work-family conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

A major shortcoming of many of these studies is that they have asked husbands and wives different questions. Husbands are more likely to be the focus when types of work environments are examined, whereas the issue of employment is the focus for wives. Studies with female samples are more likely to focus on negative outcomes (Spitze, 1988). Studies also have, for the most part, ignored psychosocial work characteristics and gender differences (Hughes et. al, 1992).

Few studies have probed the effects of a specific occupation on the family. It is more common to focus, for example, on the effects of two-careers on family life (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1976; Hall and Hall, 1979; Sekaran, 1986). Exceptions to this include Berquist (1991) who investigated farm families' communication in managing crisis. A panel entitled "Dual-Career Couples in Communication: Strategies for Professional and Personal Success" was featured at the 1989 SCA convention (Panel # 2637, p. 77 SCA program). Topic areas included coping with professional/personal development, family issues, nepotism policies, and effect on collegiality in the department. In the present study, we examine the impact of teaching communication on

the spousal role for couples where only one partner teaches communication. We use a communication competence framework since it seems logical that the communication teacher "ought" to be a competent communicator, and competent communication should impact his/her role as a spouse. We also attempt to compensate for some of the shortcomings of previous research by including psychosocial work characteristics and by asking males and females the same questions.

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

A communication professional, defined here as one who has advanced study, degrees, and training in interpersonal, communication, public speaking, and/or other areas that might be included in the traditional field of speech communication, might well be considered a competent communicator, since the teaching professional has as his or her task, the training of others in the various skills of communication. The teaching of communication might be expected to impact the marital relationship of a communication teaching professional and his or her spouse because the competent communication used should have an impact on the role of the spouse. The primary focus of this study is on the impact of the communication profession on the interaction patterns in the marriage.

Competent communication has recently been defined by Adler & Towne (1993) as "the ability to get what you are seeking from others in a manner that maintains the relationship on terms that are acceptable to both you and the other person" (pp. 27-28).

There seems to be some agreement as to what goal might be achieved by competent communicators, but little agreement as to what constitutes a competent communicator. Earlier definitions have focused on a variety of factors in communication including objectives, collaboration, and adaptation (Bochner & Kelly, 1974).

Various definitions of competent communication have identified a number of areas of study which include knowledge, skills, flexibility, and an awareness and concern for the other interactant. Wiemann also delineated a model composed of five dimensions: (1) affiliation/support, (2) social relaxation, (3) empathy, (4) behavioral flexibility, and (5) interaction management skills. Wiemann referred to his model as a definitional model which

> suggests that the competent interactant is other-oriented to the extent that (she) he is open (available) to receive messages from others, does not provoke anxiety in others by exhibiting anxiety (her) himself, is empathic, has large enough behavioral repertoire to allow (her) him to meet the demands of changing situations, and, finally, is supportive of the faces and lines (her) his fellow interactants present (p. 197).

Effective communication contributes to the "long-term maintenance' of the relationship. Wiemann added, "the competent communicator is the person who can have (her) his way in the relationship while maintaining a mutually acceptable definition of that relationship" (p. 198). This mutuality dimension of communication competence is what makes application of the concept

of communication competence to the marital relationship particularly appropriate. Mutual satisfaction is especially critical in the long-term marital commitment. However, the focus has remained mostly on observable behaviors. Little attention had been given to the unobservable internal constructs that become involved in "behavioral competence."

Larson, Backlund, Redmond, and Barbour (1978) offered a broader definition that included two other considerations. Behavior was still the primary focus, but the dimensions of context and appropriateness were added. The concept of context is particularly important to the study of marital interaction, since the marriage relationship is a very specialized context for communication, particularly because of its long-term and continuous nature. "Appropriateness" still needed to be explained. Still, an element yet to have been considered was the person's "inclination" to behave in the manner considered "appropriate."

Backlund and Wiemann (1978) pointed out that there were basically two groups of definitions: cognitive definitions and behavioral definitions. They agreed that "the primary consideration appears to be the need to understand the communication abilities necessary for adequate functioning in general society" (p. 6). However, they did note a narrowness in definitions and called for a broader definition:

> To be theoretically and pragmatically meaningful, any conceptualization of competence must include both behavioral and nonbehavioral dimensions, and include

> all the critical factors that influence communicative behavior (p. 7).

In other words, both behavioral skills and cognitive knowledge should be involved in communication competence. The conceptualization of nonbehavioral dimensions does, however, seem limited to "cognitive" processes.

McCroskey (1982) reviewed the research and literature on communication competence and found little consensus on the definition or the behavioral skills. The major difference between earlier definitions (Larson, et al, 1978 and Wiemann, 1977) was that Larson, et al (1978) defined communication competence as the 'ability" to demonstrate while the Wiemann (1977) definition maintained that the person must actually "demonstrate" that ability in order to be considered competent. Again, this distinction reflects the lack of a real consideration of the communicator's "inclination" in communication competence. A fully competent communicator may consciously chose not to behave "appropriately." McCroskey (1982) favored the definition advanced by Larson, et al in terms, not of rightness or wrongness, but in terms of usefulness.

> The view taken here is that accomplishment of goals (effectiveness) is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for a judgment of competence. One may be effective without being competent and one may be competent without being effective.... Clearly, competent communicators do not always accomplish their goals, nor do incompetent communicators always fail to accomplish their goals. Effectiveness as a definitional criterion of competence is not only excess baggage, it also will lead to inappropriate judgments of the competence of individuals (p. 3).

McCroskey stressed the importance of the ability of the person to demonstrate the skill and not the willingness or actual doing of the behavior in a given situation. In making this distinction, he has hinted at the difference between cognitive, behavioral, and affective learning. One could occur without the other. A goal in research on interpersonal effectiveness or communication competence needs to determine which type of learning has or has not occurred.

Spitzberg (1983) disagreed with McCroskey and added the third domain. Spitzberg argued that all three are interdependent and must be included in communication competence.

> My argument is basically this: Effectiveness requires performance. Effective performance, while not requiring skill, is far more likely when skills are possessed. Competence, to be maximally sensible and useful as a construct, requires each of these concepts in addition to the constructs of motivation and knowledge. This is sensible because communication is functional, and communication competence involves skill in achieving these functions. Consequently, communication competence involves functional effectiveness (p. 326).

Put in terms of the domains of learning, McCroskey included two, but omitted the third. Any consideration of communication competence must include k[illegible]ledge (cognitive domain), skills (behavioral domain), and att[illegible]de (affective domain).

This concept of communicat[illegible] competence is an appropriate framework from which to study marit[illegible] interaction patterns. It is especially appropriate because of the special interpersonal relationship involved in marriage which clearly involves emotions

(the affective domain) and derives its primary basis from emotional involvement. In addition, teaching communication assumes cognitive knowledge and behavioral skills. In much the same way that McCroskey indicated, "effective performance...is far more likely when skills are possessed," it may also be asserted that effective skills are far more likely when knowledge is possessed. A communication teacher is more likely to be a competent communicator as a possessor of both knowledge and skills. Yet, those in the profession know of numerous examples of communication teachers who have not had success in the marital interpersonal relationship.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of teaching communication on the marital roles of communication teachers and their spouses. Specifically, the role of the communication professional is examined from the perspective of perceived competence in communication by the spouse as well as the professional him/herself. Communication competence is defined by the individual's perception of appropriate communicative behavior in a variety of situations in which the communication professional is expected to communicate effectively. The analysis focuses on the three domains of learning outlined above. Communication professionals might well be expected to be behaviorally competent by their spouses as a result of their demonstrated cognitive competence. However, the study further examines the affective domain of competence in an effort to explain the observed inconsistency between the

verifiable cognitive competence and the actual variability in behavioral competence.

PROCEDURE

The Sample

The sample consists of two male and two female communication professionals (CP's) and their spouses (n=8). Some of the CP's teach at a small private liberal arts college and others teach at a large public university, both located in a major midwestern city. Length of marriage ranges from 2 to 16 years (averaging 9 years), age ranges from 26 to 42 years (averaging 35 years), and teaching experience ranges from 5 to 20 years (averaging 12.75 years). Three of the couples have children, with ages ranging from 2 to 12 years (averaging 7.5 years). All of the spouses are employed outside the home. Occupations include elementary school teacher, secretary (spouses of male CP's), psychologist, and associate professor (spouses of female CP's).

The Questions

Eight discussion questions about the impact of teaching communication on the spousal role were provided to the couples (Appendix A). Perceptions of both the communication professional and the spouse were probed. For example, the CP's were asked for examples of application of communication theories, concepts, behaviors in their communication with spouses. Spouses were asked to respond and for their perceptions of how the CP's profession affected communication with them. Couples were asked to discuss the questions in a comfortable conversational format

and to tape record their answers. The length of the taped conversations ranged from 25 to 50 minutes. Additionally, the couples completed a brief demographic information form (Appendix B).

RESULTS/ANALYSIS

Four taped conversations between communication professionals and their spouses were transcribed and examined for common themes. The following four themes emerged: (1) KNOWING AND SAYING DOESN'T MEAN DOING; (2) "NATURAL"--THE KEY TO POSITIVE APPLICATION; (3) HIGHER STANDARDS ARE EXPECTED; (4) LET'S METACOMMUNICATE. These themes is examined from the perspective of the three domains with inconsistencies between knowledge and behavior as the primary focus.

Knowing and Saying Doesn't Mean Doing

Both the CP's and their spouses provided illustrations that possession of cognitive knowledge does not guarantee application. Areas that emerged in the dialogue included cognitive (awareness), affective (feeling, motivation), and behavior (demonstrating skill). The affective appears to moderate the cognitive-behavior link.

Awareness. Awareness seems to operate on a continuum, which ranges from the subconscious to an active perception. Differences in time are also noted, with some awareness taking place concurrently with interaction and other retrospectively.

Couple 3--subconscious awareness

CP: When we are interacting, I think what it does affect, it

affects me, so therefore it affects us, but I don't think it is because I'm thinking sometimes of it.

****

Couple 4--teaching/reading heightens awareness

CP: Yeah. I guess I can't say that my teaching it has improved things, if anything, I feel that my teaching it has just made me realize that some of the things that we already do are what good interpersonal skills are about. When I teach interpersonal communication, I give examples from what we already do and I don't know that I necessarily read a chapter from a book or about a new concept and then come home and consciously try it out on you. So if anything, it reinforces what we have done right rather than make changes. Because I know that I avoid conflict. But knowing about it doesn't (laughter)

S: That's what I think it's done. I think it your teaching it has just made us aware of it, not necessarily

CP: Trying to change us.

S: Trying to change us or to apply teaching principles.

****

Couple 1--active awareness

CP: Conflict.. when I read about conflict episodes start and prior conditions and things like that. I always try to be real aware of that. And when you talk about escalating spirals and deescalating spirals I can see those coming, and so usually I try not to fall into that.

****

The three communication professionals cited above talk about various levels of awareness of communication theories and skills during the actual interaction. The subconscious awareness of Couple 3 might indicate what Adler & Towne (1993) refer to as the level of skill integration which is their goal of studying interpersonal communication. However, it might be suggested that

the greater competence is demonstrated by the spouse who consciously applies communication concepts and skills during interaction. Couple 2, on the other hand, in the dialogue presented at the beginning of this paper, provides another example of both active and concurrent awareness. Awareness, as they describe, can have negative consequences in that awareness can become a distracting cycle for both spouses.

Positive consequences are reflected in the following statement from couple 3:

> CP: It helps sometimes to know what's happening, but other times it helps me to know what I'm not doing right even though I'm not doing it right. So I know there are times when I know what I should be doing but I'm not doing...And I think where it's apparent, ah, when I know that I'm not doing it is when we have conflict.

This statement also illustrates how experiencing conflict can serve raise awareness of communication deficiencies when at least one of the partners has the cognitive knowledge.

Affective. Failure to apply cognitive awareness and knowledge was strongly linked to the affective domain, which seems to function as a blocker. Couples spoke of lack of application due to anger, stress, burnout, lack of sleep, and focus on personal needs. As noted by two spouses (an elementary school teacher and a psychologist), this lack of application does not appear to be unique to communication professionals. It also suggests the situational nature of communication competence in the definition advanced by Wiemann (1977).

Couple 1--Cognitive not linked to behavior

CP: Of course, when I'm angry. I may know that I shouldn't say something, but I'll say it anyway. I don't care

S: Or you know that you should communicate or talk something through and you will withhold.

CP: But I'm more likely in terms of conflict style, that I'll want to get it settled and done with whereas you'll

S: I think you used to be more and more like that. I'm more the withholder. I think you have seen the power in it and have turned the tables on me.

CP: When I'm stressed, when I'm real focused on my own needs.

S: What I like about this interview is that it's all about you.

CP: This gives you a chance to beat up on me.

S: We all know a lot of things in our profession that we don't often apply and I think stress is one of those times. When I haven't had enough sleep and I think I've noticed in you when you haven't had enough sleep haven't had enough rest, you don't think about those things. It's kind of base natural reaction to stuff.

CP: My emotional takes over.

S: And you don't really care. I think if I'd bring it up, what you know about that, you'd spit tacks at me. And I would at you when you bring it up. Like I know it, don't tell me.

****

Couple 2

CP: There are times when I don't feel like it. I don't want to be confirming. I want to be disconfirming. Not intellectually, but when I don't feel like it. There's not a cognitive and behavior linkage, but an emotional behavior linkage.

S: I think communication people are guilty of what a lot of the others of us are guilty of. We come home at the end of the day after practicing communication and practicing dealing with kids all day long and we're tired of dealing with children in my case and being listening and doing all the appropriate procedures and helping and feeding back and therefore because we've done it all day, then we get with

the people we love, who should be the people we do it with first and foremost....

CP: I tend to process things way too much. I find it very frustrating when I can see exactly what's going on and either can't, won't, or don't feel like doing anything about it...

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Couple 3

CP: ...and then I get even more mad. Then it's like then every kind of consciousness I had just goes flying out the window.

All of the examples demonstrate that situational factors moderate cognitive competence and hinder behavioral competence by triggering a powerful affective behavioral response which negates cognitive communication competence. The power of this response is clearly illustrated by the metaphorical images of spitting tacks, consciousness flying out the window, and the emotional taking over.

Behavior. In addition to the affective serving as a blocker for application of cognitive knowledge to behavior, communication professionals also noted skill deficiencies in certain areas.

Couple 2

CP: I'm pretty good at exposing myself to communication, using McGuire's Information Processing Model, paying attention to it at times, understanding it, even agreeing and disagreeing, which is the yielding stage, but where I really fall down is at the retention stage. I don't know if I just have a really bad memory or If I'm getting a disease. or if it is got a low priority when I was listening to it and that's why it didn't get stuck into long term memory.

S: Well I don't agree with the poor memory because any kid that can tell you what happened on his third or fourth birthday doesn't have a poor memory. I could see, though, the part about low priority listening and putting it into

long term memory, that would make sense.

****

Couple 4

CP: This whole class on communication and conflict. I do all the things that I'm not supposed to do. I avoid, I smooth, I pretend it doesn't happen, not that we have I guess any major conflicts that, I mean we really don't have any that we've been putting aside for a long time. If there's a conflict it's just because...

****

The above dialogues might indicate that communication professionals, while cognitively competent, may not posses all the behavioral skills presupposed in behavioral competence. One explanation may be that communication is a diverse field and that all communication professionals may not be competent in interpersonal communication skills. In other words, we're not perfect all the time.

"Natural"--The Key to Positive Application

The most positive applications seem to be those in which the CP has reached integration of the skill. Adler and Towne (1993) present four stages of skill acquisition: (1) beginning awareness; (2) awkwardness; (3) skillfulness, in which the skill is handled well, but one still needs to think about the action; and (4) integration, in which the behavior becomes automatic and seems natural. Spouses view skills that have become integrated as a "natural" part of the communication professional or a "natural" part of the marital relationship.

Couple 3--the positives from natural

S: I never get the idea when we're communicating that you're incorporating communication theory and that has been a surprise to me cause I expected that you would. "Well, what's happening here is.", and "What we need to do here is", but that's never come into, but you've been as irrational as me...It's only when we're in conflict that I think of communication. Well, she's going to lay some communication stuff on me and you never do, ever. Now you probably will.

CP: No, I don't think so because usually what I'm doing is usually for my own benefit if I do think it. If I am thinking about theory, and usually it's not while we're interacting, usually it's more retrospective or analytical.

S: See, I'm not aware that you're using anything. I just assume that we communicate. I assume that we communicate well. I consider our relationship to be a good relationship, a good partnership...I assume you're a good communicator, not because of your training. It comes so "naturally." (italics added) No, I just assume that you're a good person and you're a good communicator, not that you have studied all these theories and that's why we are getting along.

CP: And I think that it helps that you're a good communicator because otherwise I would be apt to say "Well, you know you're supposed to be--you know what I mean? Then maybe I would become more--parental maybe, because it's like if I were to say "This is the theory."

S: It would drive me nuts.

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Couple 04

CP: We talk a lot about--I'm an avoider of conflict and so I wouldn't say I apply that...I guess if I do anything it's more unconscious. I don't think about it, I guess. I think of the things we do well would be some of the communication things we did well before I became an instructor. I mean we try to listen to each other and ...I don't think we let misunderstandings go on...listening, empathy, appropriate self disclosure.

S: I think a lot of it is just stuff you don't necessarily learn from teaching.

CP: That's a teacher's worst thing to hear from a student, "It's just common sense."

S: I'm not saying it's just, I'm saying a lot of it is.

****

Couple 1

S: Well, I think that when you use them very naturally, it has a really positive impact on our relationship. We don't even know, I mean, I think that at those times you are so effective with it that I don't think about them being...I think of them as a good tools that you have and that I appreciate and might admire. At the same point in time when I become really aware of them, just like you become aware of me using some of the stuff I know

CP: Your therapy stuff.

S: you might comment to me, "I don't need you to be my therapist."

CP: When you say to me, "What are YOU going to do about it?"

S: Something along that line, is like when it doesn't feel natural and it feels like we're not equal. We don't appreciate it in each other, but when we can make it work for ourselves in a very natural way and it doesn't seem condescending or imbalanced, I think it has a really positive impact.

CP: A lot of times I'm using communication theory, but I don't really think about applying it.

S: Right, and that's the times that I'm saying that it has the most positive effect. When you're thinking about it and it becomes intellectualized, then it comes off as either condescending or manipulative and I don't want to listen to you about it.

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The spouses in all of these examples demonstrate a classic application of attribution theory. They attribute positive behaviors to some spontaneous "natural" or personality characteristic of the CP. Later discussion illustrates spouses attributing negative behaviors (those not demonstrating

communication competence) to "unnatural" or calculated application.

Although the integration skill level appears to have the most positive effects, the skillfulness level, which still requires thought, also is viewed as having a positive impact--particularly when the CP does not articulate his/her thoughts to the spouse.

Couple 3--skillfulness

CP: I will usually do things in my head a lot more than tell you. At least I don't think I say things a lot.

S: No you don't. What specific ones are you using on me? Are you using with us?

CP...(talking about attribution theory) So I can see that when I do that when I do it and I can see it when we do it, and I can see me doing it to you. So things like that and perception, I do a lot of stuff mentally, but I don't think I ever say it out loud.

S: No you don't...I'm definitely not aware when you are using communication principles with me, if you are. I mean, I have no idea if you are. As a matter of fact, that's been kind of surprising about our marriage is that hasn't happened in our whole relationship. I've been mildly surprised that communication theory has not come in the middle of our--particularly our conflicts is when I expected it to come up. And you'd say, "Well, what is really going on here is..." so

CP: No, because usually during conflict I'm thinking, " I shouldn't be saying this"...but I say it anyway.

****

In these comments, the communication professional, while consciously thinking about communication theory and skills, uses this knowledge for her own benefit and does not try to control or "teach" her spouse, thus maintaining the mutuality of the

relationship. In other words, they are maintaining the relationship in a manner that is acceptable to both parties (Adler & Towne, 1993). (NOTE: This couple has only been married for two years!)

As expressed by the spouse in Couple 1, the most negative applications of communication theory/skills are those which seem intellectualized, condescending, and manipulative. In some of these cases, the CP may still be in the awareness and awkward stages of skill acquisition. Another interpretation is be that the CP may want to be manipulative which again suggests that influence of the affective domain of competence. A third possible interpretation is that the spouse in this case is a trained clinical psychologist and may be attributing motives not intended by the CP as a result of his greater sensitivity to interpersonal communication.

Couple 1

S: I think sometimes you use communication theory to try to get me to do something you want me to do. So you will quote me chapter and verse on what proper communication theory says what I need to be doing in order to try to manipulate me into doing something the way you want me to or see it the way you want me to see it.

CP: For example? Can you give me an example?

S: I can remember times that you , you've told me that ah I'm not ah really ah using what theory tells us needs to be done in order to reach some sort of conclusion. Or negotiate some sort of proper solution to something as if your stating that is going to get me to (laughter) do something differently.

CP: How is following process manipulative?

S: It's commenting on process in order to guilt somebody

into using the process

CP: And you don't think we should use the process?

S: Well, I'm certainly not going to switch my way of communicating with you simply because you've told me what I'm properly supposed to do. Another thing I've noticed--if you happen to be teaching something, it's really foremost in your mind at that point in time, so therefore you concentrate on it. Sometimes it will come out in conversation like you all of a sudden. It's been heightened in your awareness and so therefore you even sometimes might use techniques or expect those kinds of communication patterns to come out because that's what you happen to be teaching at the time.

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Verbally analyzing interpersonal communication in a spousal interaction can have the perceived effect of manipulation and result in increased defensiveness on the part of the spouse. The mutuality of the relationship may suffer and create a feeling of inequality or even inferiority which, of course, can lead to increased resistance.

A particular potential pitfall for communication professionals is falling into the trap of labeling what is happening and thus depersonalizing it fcr the spouse.

Couple 1

CP: I remember that one time I think you kind of resented it because we were talking about these friendships you have and you thought that they were really deep friendships and you said it was because you shared so much of yourself with them and they had in turn had shared a lot with you. I said of course, it's the norm of reciprocity, self-disclosure breeds self-disclosure. (laughter)

S: Right and sometimes you'll want to bring it down to, yeah, of course, as if it doesn't have meaning. Just because the process is there comment on it like that really doesn't mean anything because that's just an "Of course." A follows

B and sometimes like you've passed over the importance that sharing may have had

CP: uh hummm uh hmm

S: the balance

CP: uh hummm uh hmmm

S: the balance theory and that happens to work and sometimes commenting on that, it's almost as if it's, what's the word,

CP: pivotal?

S: um. That's not what I was going to say.

CP: It devalues the uniqueness, do you think or...

S: Kind of impersonalizes it or makes light of my reality.

(note: The spouse in Couple 1 is a psychologist, which helps explain some of his usage of communication jargon.)

Depersonalizing expressed feelings or experiences by labeling (analyzing) can be perceived as a lack of empathy. As Wiemann (1977) indicated in his model of competent communication, empathy was an essential dimension of competence.

Higher Standards are Expected

A third theme is that spouses do expect effective communication from communication professionals. Areas mentioned include: expressing feelings, handling conflict constructively, and demonstrating good receiving skills. This expectation appears to go both ways, as communication professionals also have high expectations for the communication in their marriages.

Couple 3

S: When we first started dating, we had conflict and you had difficulty expressing your feelings, and that really

surprised me, because I thought, as a communication person, this was very odd. I thought you would be able to express yourself, and I don't know, what the heck--you can know the theories but it still comes down to personality. That was true, that I did think that, that you should get past that and be able to express yourself, because you would know how valuable that was to be able to express your feelings.

CP: Uh hmm.

S: And I, are there times when I think to myself that my spouse doesn't apply, I do think that--when we're especially when we get into an argument, I'm thinking, something went wrong here. [CP] should have known how to head this off. It's not that I consciously think that, but I think that when you do something when we're in conflict that I feel is irrational, I think, "Well, she's the one who studies this. She should know!"

CP: ...I think I expect more of you because I know how much communication has to do with marriage. And I think it might be what I know about marital satisfaction and communication. Recently, I think the one thing that I've brought up--through the literature they say that communication decreases once children are in the picture and therefore satisfaction is lower.

S: Yeah. I remember you talking about that.--Do you think that is you weren't a communication professional that we would have had children right away after we got married. Now that I think about it, it was important to you and you convinced me that we needed a time for intimacy, just the two of us.

CP: And to develop healthy communication patterns.

****

Couple 2

S: Because he is in communication there are times when I use that as a catch all and I expect him to be doing a good job of listening and a good job of feeding back.

CP: I send better than I receive.

S: I'd say that is very true. [CP] is very good on sending, but he needs to work on receiving skills. The listening kinds of thinks. Just from this interview count the number of times he interrupted me... I expect him to always be listening and hearing what I'm saying. I expect him to be reading and interpreting my nonverbals. I expect

him to just be a good listener. And I think that maybe, I don't know, I've never been married to anybody else, so I don't know if there is a difference in people

CP: Be careful

S: who aren't in communication. if they're better listeners than people who are in communication. I don't know if he was not in communication if I'd have different expectations of his listening skills. I kinda doubt it. I think I would expect my husband to be a good listener and be good at communicating regardless of whether he was in the field of communication or not...Although I think most spouses of communication people probably have some pretty strong feelings. And maybe that's because we have too high of expectations or unrealistic expectations.

These examples clearly illustrate that both the CP and the spouse expect communication competence of each other. Perhaps this is part of marital expectations. When people love each other, they "ought" to try to be competent communicators. Again, a number of Wiemann's (1977) dimensions come into play here. Affiliation/support and social relaxation are usually seen as a part of this intimate relationship. Empathy, behavioral flexibility, and interaction management skills all seem necessary to a successful and effective marital commitment.

A subtheme under the general theme of higher expectations is: YOU CAN HANDLE THAT - YOU'RE THE COMMUNICATION PERSON. Spouses, particularly female spouses, do say that they expect the CP to handle certain tasks because they are "in" communication. Both female spouses suggest a complementarity of needs in that they appreciate the CP handling communication tasks because they are not comfortable with them.

Couple 2

S: As much as I hate to admit it, I am still a typical wife from the standpoint of I expect, I allow or I give my husband certain tasks that lots of people would say would be good tasks for the communicator of the family like getting directions and going to talk to somebody, getting freebies, those kinds of things. So anyway, (CP) does those kinds of things in our family. I don't know that it is because he is the communication person or because that is the place or is it because he's just so much more outgoing and verbal than I am and so it is just so much more natural for him to do those kinds of things than it is for me. And that could be because he choose communication too because all those things were just so much more natural for him and communication was the last thing I chose. I didn't want to take that class.

CP: And it was sending skills class, only.

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Couple 4

(Responding to question "Do you think you give your spouse certain tasks because...?)

S: Yes!

CP: Like what? I was going to say no to that. What do you do because I'm a communication person?

S: I make you call places on the phone, and I make you speak in church. I say, "Well, you're the one with the communication ability, talk." Like this whole small group seminar that we just did. I didn't necessarily say you had to, but I didn't want to get up there and talk....

CP: The small group ministry is something that we do as a couple where I do kind of take the leadership role....You say you make me talk on the phone, but sometimes I have you do it.

S: We argue over that and my reasoning is, well, you're the communication

CP: See, and I feel that you do secretary and receptionist work and so you

S: I don't do receptionist work. I hate to.

CP: Well, you used to....Well, I just assumed that. See, there's another thing I shouldn't do....

Let's Metacommunicate

The conversations indicated that communication professionals and their spouses engage in metacommunication frequently. The use of metacommunication was viewed as a positive tool, as a relational asset, and as a communication game that could either be fun or a real drag.

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Couple 4

CP: Do you see what I just did? I talked over you. I finished your sentence for you. That's a terrible thing to do, although I do that to everybody.

CP: How do you think your spouse's teaching comm. affects his/her communication with you.

S: I think maybe you are aware of it.

CP: Yeah, I think that's the key thing. I don't think either one of us has really changed our--even just now

S: It's not like we had these huge problems with communication in our marriage that we said, Oh, now that you are teaching this, this is great--now we can really learn how to fix our marriage.

CP: [joking] We need to engage in more metacommunication. But I guess we do use terms more and we do think about things more.

S: Well, we met in a small group communication class.

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Couple 2

S: We play different kind of games than other people do because we know about the communication games to a certain point and I accuse him of it and I expect him to have wonderful communication and I expect him to give me the verbal feedback. He used to do that a lot better than he does now.

CP: What do you supposed accounts for that change?

S: Is that the husband talking or is that the--? Sixteen years of marriage.

CP: Like maybe we've gotten into a rut?

****

Couple 3

S: See and I

CP: [interrupting] except remember when we had...I'm sorry.

S: Yeah, go ahead.

CP: Except remember when we had that--I was taking--what class was it? And there was for like a month everything I talked about I said, "Well, that's because."

S: Was that male, that female

CP: communication. Maybe that was it.

S: Yeah.

CP: But it was more like a fun kind of game thing than it was--I think it was on male-female communication. We were talking about power and powerless language...

S: We talk about communication theory a lot because I read your papers and we talk about that a lot...When we're in group I do notice, but once again I don't think of you as being a communication professions, I just think of you as a person who notices when certain things are happening within a small group, when somebody's dominating, or when somebody--I have a tendency to cut people off, and you notice that, and I notice that you notice that."...I think it's the biggest asset of our relationship now that I think about it. The biggest asset about you being a communication professional in our relationship is I can talk to you about communication, and I know that you will not only understand, but you will probably understand more than I do, but I can talk to you about how we communicate in a way that other, other couples can't because you know, I mean, I think I'm the luckiest dog in the world here, because we can talk about communication, and I think--I have a lot of faith in what I do intuitively, I know a lot of things intuitively about people and relationships and I think that we have a unique situation, because then I can articulate that in my stumble bumble way, but I don't feel foolish about doing that. I know that I can speak to you about communication. I mean, in the big conflict that we might have had, I can

speak about--I can speak jargon that you understand and that you can articulate back to me when we talk about behaviors as opposed to...and I can talk to you about your focusing on my behavior and not on my attitude. We can talk through a tough problem that way and avoid what might be roadblocks for many other couples because I felt I could talk to you about that...

CP: There are a lot of things that we do a lot of metacommunicating about. We talk about how we're communicating.

S: That's true

CP: And we do that quite a bit, especially when we're really working through something.

The couples demonstrate sensitivity and awareness of their own communication patterns, that is, interruptions, communication games, role shifts, and meta-perspectives (awareness of the other's awareness). Metacommunication is viewed as a positive dimension in marital communication. Spouses appreciate the discussing their communication patterns under appropriate circumstances. Appropriate circumstances include the desire of both parties to discuss their own communication. The affective dimension must be a primary consideratien in such a discussion is appropriate. Highly emotional or stressful situations do not seem to be fitting moments for metacommunication. This is in keeping with Larson et. al (1978) who stressed context and appropriateness as critical dimensions in communication competence.

CONCLUSION

Dimensions of communication competence outlined by various authors were used to study the impact of communication teaching

on the role of the spouse. Four major themes emerged:

1. Knowing and saying doesn't mean doing
2. "Natural"--the key to positive application
3. Higher standards are expected
4. Let's metacommunicate

The three domains of learning were applied to communication competence and demonstrated that cognitive competence and behavioral competence were mediated by affective competence. That is, communication professionals who were both cognitively and behaviorally competent did not always demonstrate this competence when emotions were involved. When emotions were involved in a communication interaction between the communication professional and his/her spouse, the competence dimensions of context and appropriateness became important. In addition, it seems that another dimension of communication competence might be added to those already listed by various authors. The ability to communicate about a couple's communication appears to be an important skill for facilitating constructive conflict in the marital relationship. Appropriate, contextual, and timely metacommunication should be added to the dimensions of marital communication competence.

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APPENDIX A

Discussion Questions for Project "Exploring the Impact of Communication Teaching on the Role of the Spouse"

Instructions: For all questions, we are interested the perceptions of both the person who teaches communication and those of his/her spouse. As much as possible, please discuss the questions in a comfortable conversational format. We hope that the questions will stimulate a dialogue between the two of you. Feel free to digress, using the questions as guidelines. You may find overlap between questions 1, 2, and 3.
If the conversation leads into areas that you don't feel comfortable sharing on tape, feel free to hit the pause button.

Turn on tape recorder and Communication teacher starts

1) What communication theories, concepts, behaviors, etc. do you think have affected you in how you communicate with your spouse?

   Spouse: Please respond to above answer. How do you think your spouse's profession as a communication teacher affects his/her communication with you?

2) Expanding on #1 above, how have these factors affected you? Please give examples. (Include comm. teacher and spouse response)

3) When you use communication theories, concepts, behaviors, etc. that you know, what impact does this have upon the relationship?

   Spouse: Are you aware of your spouse's useage of communication principles? What impact do you feel they have?

4) Are there times when you don't apply the communication theories, concepts, behavior, etc. that you know? (Include comm. teacher and spouse response)

   Spouse: Are there times when you think your spouse doesn't apply what s/he knows?

5) Are there any other influences you see from teaching communication on your role as a spouse? (Include comm. teacher and spouse response)

6) (For spouse who doesn't teach communication) Do you think you give your spouse certain tasks because they are the "Communication person?"

7) Was communication style, behavior, etc. an important factor in how you chose your spouse? (Both respond, please)

8) How does the fact that your spouse teaches communication affect your expectations of his or her communication?

9) Overall, are you happy that your spouse teaches communication or not?

10) If you were doing this study, what other questions would you ask? (Both spouse and comm. teacher)

Memory Joggers
(not comprehensive--just a few to get you started)

Skills: perception checking, paraphrasing, description rather than evaluation, supportive statements, confirmation, recognition, dialogue, acceptance, stroking, indexing, dating, being specific and concrete rather than abstract, avoiding defensive communication, avoiding barriers, congruence between verbal and nonverbal, appropriate eye contact and other nonverbal skills, listening, empathy, appropriate self-disclosure, conflict resolution skills (establishing beltlines, time/place for discussion, negotiation, etc.), applying persuasive strategies, decision-making/problem solving process, etc.

Theories/concepts: perception, self-concept, self-fulfilling prophecy, relationship development and maintenance concepts and models--Knapp & Altman and Taylor, creating meanings in relationships, communication rules, networks, development of intimacy--relational currencies, theories/models of self-disclosure, role development and communicating expectations, gender issues, theories re: conflict, power; marital satisfaction, decision-making models, stress/coping, rhetorical theories, etc.

APPENDIX B

Demographics

_____ Length of this marriage

(optional) Number of other marriages_____

_____ Age husband

_____ Age wife

_____ Does spouse work outside home? (Y or N)

If yes, spouse's occupation_____

_____ If children, how many? Ages_____

Teaching areas in communication:

_____ Length of teaching experience (in teaching comm.)